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ABSTRACT

Major findings are presented of a national comparative study with two primary objectives: first, to identify performance of rural special education service delivery systems prior to the 1975 enactment of Public Law (PL) 94-142 and again during the 1979-1980 school year in providing a free, appropriate education for all handicapped children, with appropriate parental involvement and support; and second, to identify facilitating and hindering factors which operate to determine the success or failure of district/cooperative compliance with PL 94-142. Data represent responses from administrators and educators from 43 special education cooperative and 32 school districts in 17 states via 2-day site visits and telephone interviews. Results deal with various categories of handicapped students identified and served; alternate instructional arrangements, roles, and responsibilities; diagnostic, vocational, and other services; changes in organizational structures; interagency agreements for services; and major problems (i.e. qualified staff recruitment/retention, funding inadequacies, and providing appropriate and continuous inservice). Performance improvements in rural special education programming and services are termed phenomenal. A national initiative for a rural teacher education program and more federal funding are deemed necessary to ameliorate many of the barriers to full implementation of PL 94-142 in rural schools. (AN)

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NATIONAL RESEARCH COMPARING RURAL SPECIAL EDUCATION DELIVERY SYSTEMS BEFORE AND AFTER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATION OF ALL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN'S ACT

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ABSTRACT

Despite problems, extraordinary progress has been made to provide a free and appropriate public education for handicapped students in rural America. Seventy-five school districts and cooperatives in 17 states involved in a study of the National Rural Research and Personnel Preparation Project exhibited significant improvements in programs and services offered and types and ages of exceptional students served. Achievements included a 92% average increase in the number of handicapped students identified and served and percentage changes in services before and after implementation of PL 94-142 up to 1,525%.

A preponderance of data indicated that major hindering factors in implementing PL 94-142 were teacher recruitment and retention problems and funding and staff development inadequacies. Although significant challenges remain, the Education of all Handicapped Children Act has clearly initiated efforts toward full services for rural handicapped students.

National Research Comparing Rural Special Education Delivery Systems Before and After Implementation of the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act

I. Introduction

More than 15 million children ages 5-17 are enrolled in rural schools (Sher, 1978), and the estimated number of handicapped students in rural schools has ranged as high as 1.8 million (Education of the Handicappped, June 6, 1979). Before the implementation of the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act (PL 94-142), special education services in many remote and sparsely populated areas were nonexistent or limited to self-contained settings.

The U.S. Office of Education has been increasingly concerned with the quality of rural special education service delivery systems. During the 1979-80 school year, the National Rural Research and Personnel Preparation Project (NRP) was requested by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) to delineate changes in special education programming before and after implementation of PL 94-142. The BEH was primarily interested in changes in programs and services for various ages and categories of rural handicapped children, major problems experienced in implementing the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act (EHA), and examples of best practices.

This article presents major findings of this commissioned study. Complete data were made available to the United States Congress and Federal agencies in a document produced by the NRP (Helge, 1980).

II. Objectives of the Study

The national comparative study had two primary objectives:

A. Identify performance of rural special education service delivery systems before and after passage of PL 94-142 in providing a free and appropriate education for all handicapped children at no cost to their families in the least restrictive environment and with appropriate parental involvement and support.

B. Identify facilitating and hindering factors which operate to determine the success or failure of district/cooperative compliance with PL 94-142.

III. Methodology

Primary respondents included administrators and educators from 43 special education cooperatives and 32 school districts in 17 states. The number of states sampled was based on budgetary limitations. Each state was selected after consultation with other national research/education organizations and projects, collaboration with U.S. Office of Education personnel, and comprehensive literature reviews. Sampling procedures were designed to include major geographic, cultural and socioeconomic lifestyles in the United States.

The State Education Agency (SEA) in each state selected four Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or education cooperatives to be sampled. SEA personnel were requested to choose two upper and two lower performing (least and most effective 5%) rural LEAs/cooperatives (regarding implementing PL 94-142 mandates) for involvement in the study.

SEAs used state LEA/cooperative monitoring data and personal knowledge of districts/cooperatives to determine upper and lower functioning LEAs/cooperatives. State department personnel were requested to verify

or disavow compliance information in LEA reports and add data regarding district characteristics and strategies. SEA personnel were also asked to consider representativeness of geographic, cultural and socioeconomic lifestyles of districts to be sampled.

SEAs were asked to adopt the following definition of rural:

> Districts are considered rural when the number of inhabitants is less than 150 per square mile or when located in counties with 60% or more of the population living in communities no larger than 5,000 inhabitants. Districts with more than 10,000 students and those within a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), as determined by the Census Bureau are not considered rural.

Basic data-gathering processes were conducted during two-day visits to each district/cooperative. These site visits have included structured interviews; analysis of due process forms, budget data, and other records; and program observations. One or more administrators (superintendent, director of special education, cooperative director, principal, or supervisor); two support personnel (therapists/itinerant personnel); two regular and two special education teachers; and 3-4 parents were interviewed in each district/cooperative.

Additional data for this study were gathered by telephone to address concerns regarding programs before and after PL 94-142 which had not been dealt with during the two-day site visit. All respondents were assured that individual responses would remain confidential. SEAs and LEAs/cooperatives were assigned numbers for analytical purposes as were individual respondents.

LEA/cooperative data gathered to discern differences in pre- and post-PL 94-142 performance were analyzed by the following methods:

A. A 31-item instrument designed to record special education service delivery strategies before and after PL 94-142 implementation was completed by the NRP staff member who visited each district/cooperative. Each of the four major aspects of PL 94-142 was considered--Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), procedural safeguards, and parental participation. A separate instrument was completed for each LEA/cooperative.

B. For each category of responses comparing the existence of services, programs, and personnel before and after implementation of PL 94-142, the number of districts/cooperatives possessing a particular variable was tabulated. Open-ended responses were categorized first. A percentage of the total n was computed and the percent of change from before to after PL 94-142 implementation was then calculated. Percentage of change was computed by the difference from before and after EHA implementation divided by the base percentage.

C. Means of percentage of change were calculated for responses requiring mathematical responses.

D. The McNemer Test for Significance of Changes was used with all appropriate data. Service and program variables identified as experiencing significant pre- and post-PL 94-142 changes (at the .05 or .01 levels) were noted.

E. Data regarding major problems in implementing PL 94-142 collected via the structured questions on the pre-post PL 94-142 instrument and anecdotal data were either calculated or catalogued and tabulated before percentages were determined. Comparisons were made between percentage responses to various factors by LEA/cooperative personnel and SEA personnel who had responded to the 1978-79 NRP study.

Although the actual date of implementation of the EHA varied from one rural LEA/cooperative to another, data reported in this article represent changes from before actual passage of PL 94-142 in 1975 to performance during the 1979-80 school year.

IV. Results

This section reports some of the significant changes and problems evident after the mandates of the EHA were implemented.

A. Numbers, Ages, and Categories of Handicapped Students Identified and Served

Dramatic changes occurred between the passage of PL 94-142 in 1975 and the 1979-80 school year. Sampled districts and cooperatives exhibited a mean increase of 92% in the average number of handicapped students identified and served as the mean increased from 114 students before to 219 students after passage of PL 94-142. Compared to data reported in the Semiannual Update on the Implementation of PL 94-142 (Blaschke, 1979), these data indicated that four times the number of unidentified or unserved students were newly served in rural areas than in the country in general.

This finding was consistent with previous findings that rural areas have had higher incidences of handicapping conditions (Farber, 1962; National Institute of Education, 1975), yet proportionately fewer handicapped students have been identified and greater proportions have been inadequately and inappropriately served (Helge, 1976, 1979).

Table 1 depicts changes in ages identified and served before and after implementation of PL 94-142. Although the most obvious ramifications of Federal mandates for handicapped students were impacts for the preschool and 16+ population, pre-PL 94-142 school-age handicapped populations in the 6-8 and 11-16 age ranges also received benefits from expanded services. Previous to the 1979-80 school year, it had been

estimated that at least 5.3% of all rural school-aged children were not enrolled in any school--twice the nonenrollment rate found in urban areas (reports of the National Conference on State Legislatures and the

Table 1

Differences in Percentages of Districts Serving Various Ages of Handicapped Students Before and After Implementation of PL 94-142

	Before PL 94-142	After PL 94-142	Percent Change
0-2 years	0%	14%	**
3-4 years	7%	63%	+800%*
5-6 years	86%	100%	+16%*
7-8 years	96%	100%	+04%
9-10 years	100%	100%	0%
11-12 years	98%	100%	+02%
13-14 years	93%	100%	+08%
15-16 years	85%	100%	+18%
17-18 years	69%	86%	+25%*
19-20 years	36%	72%	+100%*
21 years	16%	68%	+325%*

* Significant to the .05 level
** Increase infinite; statistic cannot be calculated

National Rural Center, 1979; reported in Education of the Handicapped, June 6, 1979).

A preponderance of handicapping conditions was cited as the major reason for nonenrollment because of the lack of available special education services and/or lack of parental information concerning such services (Education of the Handicapped, June 6, 1979).

Table 2 depicts extraordinary changes in categories of handicapping conditions identified and served before and after implementation of

PL 94-142. These findings were indicative of greater numbers of service options for a wider age and disability span of handicapped children.

Table 2

Categories of Handicapping Conditions Identified and Served Before and After PL 94-142 Implementation

Disability Area	Before PL 94-142	After PL 94-142	Percent Change
Educably Mentally Handicapped	57%	72%	+26%*
Speech Impaired	37%	61%	+65%*
Trainable Mentally Handicapped	59%	77%	+31%*
Learning Disabled	27%	79%	+193%*
Hearing Impaired	25%	60%	+140%
Emotionally Disturbed	09%	52%	+478%*
Visually Handicapped	17%	57%	+235%*
Severely Handicapped	04%	47%	+1075%*
Orthopedically & Physically Handicapped	07%	47%	+571%*
Multihandicapped	0%	47%	**
Developmental Disabilities	0%	01%	**
Handicapped Students not Classified by Disability Area	08%	0%	-100%*

* Significant to the .05 level
** Increase infinite; statistic cannot be calculated

Alternate Instructional Arrangements, Roles, and Responsibilities. Use of self-contained settings for handicapped students increased only an average of 15% although numbers of students served increased 92%. Data clearly elucidated increased use of alternate settings, personnel, and services to build a continuum of services needed for LRE education. The 48% increase in districts/cooperatives with self-contained trainable mentally handicapped (TMH) units was the notable exception. This increase

resulted from increased numbers of TMH students being educated within the home district who were previously unserved or served in residential or private placements.

Noncategorical resource rooms were found in an additional 24% of the sampled districts/cooperatives. The percentage of mainstreamed classrooms increased 86%.

In addition, major increases were identified in interaction among interdisciplinary professionals as: (1) regular educators began to accept more responsibility for education of all children, including the handicapped, (2) additional related service personnel became involved with handicapped children via diagnostic and consultation efforts, (3) interagency agreements were greatly expanded, (4) mandated IEPs forced professional behavior changes including interdisciplinary planning and implementation efforts, and (5) interdisciplinary inservice efforts began. Teachers and support personnel reported increased meetings, consultation, and informal staff development efforts. Such interactive efforts were attributed by district/cooperative personnel as facilitating improved services and evaluations.

C. Diagnostic Services

The average increase in educational, psychological, and medical diagnostic and evaluation services was 35%. Diagnostic and psychological testing increased 119% as districts/cooperatives implemented procedures for more appropriate psychological and other testing as per PL 94-142 mandates. Many districts/cooperatives began to implement multidisciplinary evaluation processes for each student evaluated. LEAs/cooperatives began to be aware of problems in implementing nondiscriminatory testing procedures.

D. Related/Support Services

Related services, previously existent in less than 10% of all rural districts/cooperatives sampled, increased approximately 50% after implementation of PL 94-142. Differences included percentage changes in physical therapy (950%), occupational therapy (531%), preschool screening (394%), and teacher consultants (356%). As LEAs/cooperatives began to understand their responsibilities for educating all children, more services were offered by and in the home district/cooperative rather than by contract.

Eighty-four percent of the districts and cooperatives reported that the roles of related services personnel had changed dramatically as a result of PL 94-142. Specialists and support personnel were finding themselves involved in new responsibilities related to PL 94-142.

A particularly positive note was that related services personnel reported more interaction with other professionals. Interdisciplinary evaluations were particularly highly rated. Diagnostic teams reported that evaluations were at a higher professional level and of superior quality after implementation of PL 94-142 mandates, even though they often felt that an inordinate amount of time and considerable expense was involved.

E. Services to Preschool Populations

The largest increase discerned in any rural LEA/cooperative service was preschool screening. The 394% change between pre- and post-PL 94-142 implementation (from 16% to 79%) was prominent and directly related to the fact that services for children aged 3 to school-age were first facilitated/mandated by PL 94-142. Districts/cooperatives were

particularly concerned about their abilities in preschool screening and programming. Needs for personnel, appropriate tests (especially for culturally different preschoolers), and programming were cited as problematic.

F. Services to Severely Handicapped Populations

Before the PL 94-142 mandated priority to serve the severely handicapped, rural community-based services for such students were rare, existing in only 23% of the districts/cooperatives sampled. A majority (77%) of the districts/cooperatives had previously placed such students in residential and private schools and agencies. By 1980, a majority (53%) of the severely handicapped students were being educated in their home district/cooperative. Additional interagency agreements, mainstreaming, and increased numbers and types of diagnostic, educational, and related services personnel have been credited for these achievements.

G. Services to Low-Incidence Populations

An investigation of pre- and post-PL 94-142 services to low-incidence populations including hearing impaired, severely handicapped, visually impaired, multihandicapped, and physically/orthopedically handicapped populations indicated a difference of 47%. Improvements in numbers and types of populations served were attributed to enhanced diagnostics, interagency agreements, co-oping, and alternate instructional arrangements, such as the use of consultant and itinerant personnel.

H. Vocational Services for Handicapped Students

Only 23% of the rural LEAs/cooperatives sampled had vocational training for handicapped students previous to PL 94-142. By the 1979-80 school year, 64% of the 75 LEAs/cooperatives had implemented some type of vocational education program. The change in the percentage maintaining vocational programs for all school-age handicapped students was 178%.

Although districts/cooperatives reported progress in initiating vocational programs for the handicapped and making regular vocational programs accessible to the handicapped, one of the problems most commonly cited by LEA/cooperative personnel interviewed was a lack of appropriate vocational and career education for the handicapped. Funding was cited as a major inhibiting factor.

I. Services for 16-21 Year Old Handicapped Students

A predominant concern of interviewees was that lack of appropriate vocational and career education programs in consonance with inadequate education programs in general for this age population contributed to high drop-out rates. Many educators and administrators related the problem to inadequacies in secondary programs for the handicapped, stating that the emphasis in most schools and by most parent advocates in the past had been at the elementary level. The feeling that most regular educators at the secondary level were primarily concerned with scheduling and content areas was felt to be a major hindrance in enacting appropriate vocational education programs for older handicapped students.

Many districts/cooperatives had made initial efforts with work-study, career education, and vocational rehabilitation programs. However, interviewees felt that significantly increased efforts should be made with interagency programs such as vocational rehabilitation and community agencies and services.

J. Changes in Organizational Structures

PL 94-142 regulations specify that any LEA unable to qualify for a $7,500 allocation (based on the number of handicapped children

served) will receive no pass-through funds. As this guideline facilitated consortia to provide special services, the NRP study noted various new organizational structures existent. Many districts which were not required to form consortia by regulation chose to do so in order to better serve identified children. Some districts shared as few as one educator or specialist (e.g., an itinerant speech therapist). Some districts had desired to form consortia but adjacent districts were not interested in doing so and were not required under PL 94-142 guidelines to do so. The consortia themselves were as varied as the geographic terrain and climatic conditions in which they existed. Consortia located in isolated ranching country or on islands where only 1-10 children were enrolled in a local one-room schoolhouse required unique district and cooperative organizational structures. Some districts consisted of only one teacher and a part-time, multi-district superintendent.

Accountability also followed a myriad of patterns as organizational charts varied from totally centralized patterns to a rancher hiring a teacher and housing him in a trailer on his one-million acre ranch. A majority of the LEAs consisted of a superintendent, a part- or full-time principal (sometimes also serving as a teacher), several regular educators, and one or more generic special educators/specialists serving as teachers of self-contained units or as a resource to one or more districts, spread over as many as 24,000 square miles. Because most rural districts did not have a full-time special education director, most special education personnel were organizationally accountable to the principal.

Interagency agreements made by cooperatives had increased from 7% of the cooperatives having such agreements before PL 94-142 to almost one-

third (29%) by the 1979-80 academic year. Many cooperatives received services from neighboring local districts as well as from social services and private placement agencies.

Cooperatives were felt to be cost-effective, using scarce resources efficiently. However, the following concerns were reported by staff of the cooperatives and their participating districts.

1. Goal displacement was possible as the emphasis on cost efficiency sometimes became the overriding goal of an administrative structure, and individual child needs were placed at a lower priority level. A caveat was necessary to maintain foci on the true purposes of the cooperative.

2. Adequate consideration had to be given to establish effective relationships between the cooperative and each district in regular as well as special education matters. This included lines of accountability of all personnel hired by the cooperative to work with some or all districts involved. For example, it was felt wise to discuss guidelines for dividing service time for cooperative personnel among various duties and districts at an early stage. Some cooperatives found it effective to allocate district costs for the cooperative staff on the basis of the amount of time in service delivery in that particular district, and other districts preferred that staff be paid on an equally split basis, no matter where services were delivered.

3. Many cooperative personnel were concerned with the abilities of shared personnel to cover vast distances effectively, such as extremes of 24,000 square miles or entire islands. Many special education supervisory staff hired by the cooperative were unable to effect special education staff working with their districts. They either had no hiring input or no control over staff actions, as many special education personnel were deemed to be accountable to the building principal once they entered his building.

4. Many staff hired by the cooperative were concerned that district personnel were abrogating their responsibilities toward the handicapped by allocating all responsibility for handicapped students to the cooperative. They felt a need for better education and commitment of district personnel in understanding their roles in complying with PL 94-142.

K. Interagency Agreements for Services

Almost all (97%) of the LEAs/cooperatives sampled had developed interagency agreements to facilitate a free, appropriate public education for rural handicapped students by 1980. These agreements were with agencies that varied from mental health, public law, and law enforcement agencies to universities and private foundations. Previously unavailable services such as physical and occupational therapy had thus been made available in many rural districts/cooperatives at no cost to families.

Interagency agreements were particularly essential in providing related and support services in sparsely populated areas with scarce professional resources. This was especially true in providing for students with low-incidence handicaps. Increased interagency agreements were reported to be partially responsible for the average increase of 92% in the number of students identified and served.

The following problems were identified regarding interagency contracts: (a) interagency agreements possible in suburban and urban districts were infeasible in remote areas far from certain types of agencies and programs; and (b) potential agreements had not been fully explored with entities such as preservice programs, law enforcement agencies, and private foundations. Many LEA/cooperative personnel ex-

pressed reservations about their grantwriting skills and concerns about requesting assistance from social agencies and university personnel.

L. Major Problems Identified

Although this article outlines considerable progress in the 75 rural districts/cooperatives sampled, numerous problems were identified which inhibited implementing the intent of PL 94-142 vis-a-vis merely procedural requirements.

Table 3 depicts major problems identified by the sampled LEAs/ cooperatives in implementing the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in rural schools.

Table 3

Major Problems Identified by Rural LEAs/ Cooperatives in Implementing PL 94-142

Problem	Percent
Difficulty Recruiting Qualified Staff	64%
Funding Inadequacies	56%
Difficulty Retaining Qualified Staff	48%
Need for Staff Development	48%
Resistance to Change	45%
Negative Attitudes of Regular Classroom Teachers and Administrators Toward Mainstreaming	43%
Long Distances Between Schools and Services	40%
Problems Providing Support Services	39%
Icy, Muddy, or Marginal Roads	33%
Transportation Inadequacies	33%
Problems of Geographic Terrain (mountains, etc.)	27%
Cultural Differences	24%
Other	62%

The following narrative will describe predominant problem areas identified, relating questionnaire and anecdotal information. Major

responses to the "other" problems category noted by 62% of all participants will also be discussed.

1. Difficulties Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Staff

A preponderance of districts/cooperatives reported recruitment (64%) and retention (48%) of qualified staff as most problematic. Retention and recruitment of qualified staff had also been identified as the most difficult aspect of implementation of the EHA by 94% of the state education agency personnel in the 19 states involved in the 1978-79 NRP study.

Social isolation, extreme weather conditions, inadequate housing, and low salaries created conditions making it most difficult to employ special education staff in many rural schools. In fact, many positions had remained unfilled for months and sometimes years.

Administrators were compelled to hire many young and inexperienced special education staff. Social and cultural isolation were cited as factors encouraging many special educators and specialists to leave rural schools as soon as openings occurred in more urban settings. Some state education agency personnel interviewed during the 1978-79 study had estimated an annual turn-over of 30-50%, with almost complete turn-over every three years among rural special education and support staff. LEA/cooperative interviewees reiterated that attrition rates such as these have had serious ramifications for personnel development and stability.

Factors such as these combined with stresses of implementing new roles and responsibilities, problems of working with parents, increased staff time and paperwork requirements, and lack of modified curriculum, to exacerbate existing inadequacies. These variables were reported as

contributing to morale problems and a reportedly acute level of teacher "burn-out."

2. Funding Inadequacies

Clearly, rural districts/cooperatives were compelled to implement PL 94-142 with inadequate resources. Fifty-six percent of all respondents reported funding levels to be a major problem in implementing the EHA. Specific areas of funding inadequacies identified include:

a. Support staff, particularly personnel to serve low incidence and severely handicapped populations

b. Transportation, particularly in view of vast land areas.

c. Facilities renovation

d. Private or residential school placements

e. Programs for preschool, 16-21 year olds, and severely handicapped populations

f. Diagnostics

g. Vocational/career education programs for handicapped students, especially for 16-21 year old populations.

It was obvious that administrators also needed improved grantwriting skills to compete for the limited amount of funds available for rural schools. An exploratory study by the Rand Corporation in six states (Bass & Berman, 1979) concluded that even in states with small school or sparsity factors in their formula funding patterns, rural schools attained less than their fair share of monies. Consequently, fewer books, instructional equipment, and other materials could be purchased in rural areas.

Addressing the socioeconomic milieu of rural districts/cooperatives, it was discerned that low tax bases and high levels of poverty impacted

special education services. In the 1978-79 NRP study, 55% of the SEA personnel reported that low tax bases had impacted rural LEA/cooperative abilities to deliver full services. Inadequacies in state tax laws, school finances, and distribution of funds were distinctive factors. This highlighted the problem that high poverty ratios in rural areas also negatively affected service delivery. One person in four is poor in rural America as compared to one in eight in urban areas and one in 15 in suburban areas (Yerger & Yerger, 1979).

3. Inadequate Staff Development Programs

Although the percentage of districts/cooperatives providing some inservice to regular classroom teachers regarding working with handicapped students had changed significantly (from 23% in 1975 to 71% in 1980), nearly half (48%) of all respondents reported inadequate staff development programs. Respondents linked this problem with staff retention problems.

Given variables such as increased staff responsibilities and roles, inadequate funding for additional staff, and the phenomenon of teacher burn-out, personnel development--difficult enough in rural areas given a stable personnel force--seldom reached beyond basic orientation to district and state philosophies. Implementing long-range plans for staff improvement was particularly difficult as high attrition was reported to necessitate re-initiation of personnel development each year or every two years. In addition, professional isolation limited access to formal staff development and technical assistance programs as well as informal professional sharing.

The following specific needs were clearly identified:

a. The need for frequent formal and informal teacher consultation was apparent. Respond-

ents particularly expressed the desire for additional consultation and therapy taking place in the regular classroom for maximum carry-over of teaching/learning.

b. The investigation of existent inservice content, process, and incentives evidenced the need for systematically planned staff development emphasizing continuity. In-service training should have been based on needs assessment and collaborative planning of those to be impacted by staff development programs. Formal and informal debriefing, processing and follow-through was needed in between individual inservice activities. Cadre approaches for implementation of an effective "ripple" effect should have been explored in more rural areas.

c. Research indicated that staff development activities were needed to facilitate attitude change and content in skill enhancement.

d. Responses indicated that well-designed evaluations need to be designed and implemented regarding total staff development programs. Evaluation designs need to be based on clearly defined objectives. Evaluations should have been used for formative modification of staff development processes.

e. The need for field-responsive teacher education programs including involving faculty with rural schools for coursework, on-site demonstrations, and support services was identified. Such endeavors would be useful not only to rural areas but also as learning experiences for university students and contributing to realism of courses taught (e.g., involvement of potential teachers and specialists for practicum, student teaching, inservice, and consultative experiences).

4. Other Problems Identified

Sixty-two percent (62%) of all respondents delineated "other problems" in implementing PL 94-142 in rural areas besides those listed in Table 3. Predominant problem areas identified are briefly described below.

a. Involving Parents of Exceptional Children

Appropriately involving parents of exceptional students was cited as a critical problem area. Most rural areas do not have local chapters of national parent organizations. Although most rural schools have provided for parental participation to meet the requirements of PL 94-142, LEA/cooperative and SEA personnel commonly pointed out that parental involvement in rural areas lacks meaningful advocacy aspects to meet the true intent of the EHA.

Specific concerns were elicited such as problems locating parents in communities heavily endowed with extended families and strategies of working with parents of different cultures. The research clearly identified dual educational needs--the need for enhancing staff skills in working with parents of special needs students and the need for parent education regarding rights of handicapped students.

b. Procedural Policy Issues

Many districts/cooperatives felt a procedural overkill related to above-described issues including paperwork and staff time requirements. It should be remembered that emphasis on record keeping and standard operating procedures is somewhat antithetical to typical values of informal rural communities.

Considerable need was felt for policy interpretation flexibility which would assist in meeting the intent of PL 94-142 without compromising compliance with Federal statutes. For example, relaxation of the requirement that therapists and aides must always be supervised by certified teachers and therapists was desired.

Respondents stated that due to difficulties in hiring staff and because itinerant personnel frequently covered vast distances, it was impossible to have on-site certified specialists at all times, given their current budget limitations and Federal flow-through money limitations anticipated for 1980-81. Respondents desired the flexibility of training paraprofessionals, community volunteers such as retired and unemployed certified teachers, etc. to be supervised at least at regular intervals by certified professionals.

Communities of distinct cultures experienced unique frustrations such as one Indian nation addressing "written notification" requirements when their tribe had no written language. A preponderance of rural schools also felt the need for shared media, materials and other resources of Title I and special education programs instead of the exclusion of handicapped children from Title I programs.

c. Needs for Technical Assistance

Anecdotal data from all districts/cooperatives indicated needs for technical assistance in solving the problems described. School personnel reported that rural schools were too frequently overlooked or isolated to receive technical assistance. In addition to specific technical assistance need areas (.g., instructional leadership development and due process procedures), LEA/cooperative administrators were interested in staff development regarding strategies to ameliorate "givens" which negatively impacted rural education (e.g., long distances between schools and services). Enhancement of grantwriting skills was also a predominant area of concern.

V. Limitations of the Study

An n of 75 districts/cooperatives limits conclusions which can be drawn for the entire United States. Participation with the NRP study was voluntary and interviewees differed in roles and in length of time employed by the LEAs/cooperatives.

However, several aspects of the research design were planned to enhance national representativeness of findings:

A. Data were gathered from a national sample chosen after a careful assessment of geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic representativeness.

B. SEAs were requested to select LEAs/cooperatives with widely variant PL 94-142 implementation performance (upper and lower functioning 5%). Two-day on-site visits occurred in each district involving interviews with persons at all levels of the organization: administrators, regular and special education teachers, support personnel, and parents.

Researchers consistently are challenged by the potential that problems are identified totally in the context of current crises. This was a particular concern because rural LEAs/cooperatives have not typically conducted systematic needs assessments involving standard-setting processes. NRP staff attempted to confront this challenge by:

A. noting repetitions between 1978-79 SEA and 1979-80 LEA responses to NRP staff queries

B. verifying comments by talking with a wide variety of individuals with different perspectives, observing programs in operation, and reviewing district/cooperative records when possible

C. gathering data for more than a year, thereby visiting schools during divergent crisis and "routine" periods

D. seeking formative input from a wide variety of national organizations and extensive literature reviews.

Another caveat in reporting findings of this type is that PL 94-142 cannot necessarily be considered the total "treatment" responsible for every noticeable change in special education programming. Anecdotal data and structured responses indicated that PL 94-142 was the primary change agent/treatment for the dramatic changes described in this document. One would assume that the EHA would at the least be a significant contributing variable in instituting new programs and services in formalizing the sparse frameworks existent for new requirements such as IEP planning meetings.

VI. Summary and Conclusions

Given relatively few Federal monies and only slight experience in serving handicapped children of almost any category with almost any service, performance improvements in rural special education programming and services have been phenomenal.

However, even the "upper functioning" LEAs/cooperatives were found to have programming inadequacies. There is no question that the greatest obstacles to full, appropriate services for handicapped rural students are difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, funding inadequacies, and providing appropriate inservice on a continuous basis.

These problems exist in tradition-bound rural environments, and are exacerbated by geographic and climatic demands of rural, remote and isolated areas. Attitudinal problems clearly hindered service delivery in some cases and often prolonged the period of time required to make programmatic changes. SEAs and LEAs/cooperatives were generally aware

of these problems and appeared to be open to assistance and suggestions for solutions.

EHA-mandated requirements of rural schools including IEP, LRE, due process and parent involvement procedures have been firmly established. The challenge now is to offer support and training to LEAs/cooperatives clearly asking for assistance at the national, regional, and local levels.

One of the major objectives assigned to the NRP was to identify effective LEA/cooperative strategies of implementing PL 94-142 appropriate for specific rural district and community subcultures. Profiles of district/cooperative-specific strategies are continuously being developed, incorporated into personnel preparation models, and nationally disseminated.

Based on the data reported in this article, it has been concluded that a national teacher education program rural initiative is necessary. Enhancement of teacher education program incentives at the faculty and student levels to be involved with rural pre- and in-service efforts would be an invaluable catalyst in ameliorating two of the greatest problems in rural schools--staff development and teacher retention.

Policy analysis regarding indirect and direct funding inadequacies in rural areas is being discussed at the Federal level. Subsequent actions seem necessary to ameliorate many of the barriers to full implementation of PL 94-142 in small schools.

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